

Lofgren Holds Hearing on USCIS Immigration Fee Increase

Questions USCIS Director on Usage of Proposed Fees and Future Plans

Washington, DC - The House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law, chaired by Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-San Jose), held an oversight hearing today on the proposed U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) immigration fee increase with testimony by USCIS Director Emilio Gonzalez.

A transcript of Rep. Lofgren's opening remarks is below:

"I would like to welcome everyone to this very first hearing of the Immigration Subcommittee in the 110th Congress. I especially welcome the Subcommittee's Ranking Member, Mr. King, the members of the Subcommittee, USCIS Director Gonzalez and the members of the public and press who have joined us here today.

"I appreciate that Mr. King and I share a commitment to reforming the nation's immigration laws. Together this Subcommittee will find a new way forward on some of the most important issues of our day.

"Our immigration services need to move ahead. They must transform themselves into 21st Century organizations, fully automated, paperless, able to communicate amongst themselves and able to track not only the status of the cases they process, but the entries and exits of those who come to the U.S.

"Our security interests demand these things and America's immigration services must be able to adjudicate cases in ways that ensure the safety and security of America and Americans. The immigration services must have the resources to do that. They must have the people, the technologies and the business processes to do their job.

"As the 9-11 Commission indicated in its report, the services our immigration authorities provide to their customers is just as important to our security. America's immigration authorities are in many ways, as the 9-11 Commission recognized, our face to the world. When the good people of the world try to come to America, to visit, to work, to live, our immigration authorities, by their actions or by their lack of action, make a statement about America and Americans.

"Excessive delays, backlogs, arbitrary decisions, they all send negative messages. Those messages, as the 9-11 Commission recognized, can harm our national security.

"As the agency charged with adjudicating applications and petitions for naturalization and immigration benefits, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service is often the first point of contact many people have with America. It is imperative that CIS provide the best possible service.

"CIS, by its own admission, is not a 21st Century organization. It has not yet implemented the technologies and business processes that it requires to adjudicate its cases effectively.

"Over the past several years, Congress has appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars to CIS to help reduce its backlog, fund its operations, and transform itself into a 21st Century organization. And yet, as we gather here today, the Administration has requested a precipitous drop in directly appropriated funds.

"In place of those funds, CIS has proposed a significant raise in its fees—by an average of 96%. In return, CIS promises to decrease its average processing times by 20%. We need to ask whether that return on investment is sufficient.

"Some of the proposed fee increases seem quite large. The fee for naturalization applications would rise by 80%. The fee for an adjustment of status applications would rise over 178%. We need to questions about the need for such large increases.

"It is also important for the Subcommittee to gain an understanding of how the agency has been spending the money it has received, both from fees and from direct appropriations, over the past few years. Only by understanding how the agency has previously invested its resources, can we fairly judge the promises it makes in its proposed fee regulation.

"We must get answers to questions about the agency's future plans and we must ask that the agency provide us with its plan to transform its technology and business processes.

"We must begin to explore the best means by which CIS ought to be funded. We know that the Immigration and Nationality Act permits, but does not require, the agency to fund its costs through user fees. Only by understanding the nature of the agency's operations can we make informed judgments about the best available means to ensure the agency has the funding it needs to perform its critical mission.

"I look forward to hearing from the witness, Dr. Emilio Gonzalez, Director of CIS, today and I look forward to gaining a fuller understanding of the agency's current practices, its future plans, and how it made its decision to raise the fees."